



SAFETY ALERT 03-00

**Seventeenth Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802**

CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM

MSO Anchorage	271-6725	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-244	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	283-3292

FIRE ON FISHING VESSEL, CREW AIRLIFTED OFF CAPE LAZAREF UNIMAK ISLAND, ALASKA

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of “Ready for Sea – Alaska”.

Incident: A 154-ft crab boat suffered an apparent stack fire that spread and engulfed the pilothouse on February 11. The crew attempted to fight the fire with fire extinguishers, water buckets, the vessel’s fire hoses and by releasing the fixed fire extinguishing system located in the engine room. The fire continued to spread resulting in the vessel temporarily losing propulsion and the means to pump water through the fire hoses. The crew was able to send out a MAYDAY from the bridge before the fire spread to the pilothouse. Shortly thereafter, the flames and intense heat destroyed all means of communication that prevented the crew from radioing updates of their situation to the Coast Guard. A nearby fishing vessel attempted to take the vessel in tow. At the time the crew abandoned the burning bridge, the vessel’s engines were in gear, but it had lost propulsion. The vessel regained propulsion, causing the vessel to run in circles complicating the assist vessel’s efforts to take it in tow. When all attempts failed, the assist vessel remained nearby the burning vessel with its five-man crew and a dog on board until a Coast Guard helicopter arrived on scene. The helicopter airlifted the crew and dog, and transported them to Cold Bay for medical treatment. All were released in good condition. The vessel drifted onto shore and went hard aground on a sandy beach with no environmental impact. Salvors will refloat the vessel when weather permits.

Lessons Learned: While the cause of the casualty is unknown, there are several lessons learned.

1. Crew training in emergency situations is critical. Conducting drills at the dock and while underway prepare crewmembers for emergency situations and increase survival chances.
2. The carriage of properly maintained and serviced fire extinguishers, fire buckets, fire axes, fire mains and hoses, and a fixed fire extinguishing system give the crew a fighting chance to put out a fire and prevent additional damage to the vessel.
3. Communications were timely and clear until the fire engulfed the pilot house and all communications were lost. Carriage of handheld VHF’s and/or a satellite phone provide a critical backup to primary communication.
4. Stack fires often occur as a result of poor maintenance. Stack spaces should be regularly inspected for carbon buildup and worn out or damaged exhaust conduits. Flammable materials should not be stored in or around the stack spaces.
5. The vessel did not have a current CG dockside exam. These free exams, performed at the dock, help identify safety deficiencies that can lead to loss of vessels and/or their crew.